

My
Heart's
Right There

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Barclay

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By FLORENCE L. BARCLAY

The Rosary

The Mistress of Shenstone

The Following of the Star

Through the Postern Gate

The Upas Tree

The Broken Halo

The Wall of Partition

My Heart's Right There

My Heart's Right There

By

Mrs. ^{Louisa (Charlesworth)} Florence L. Barclay, ¹⁸⁶²⁻¹⁹²¹

Author of "The Rosary," etc.



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1913
H. H. H.
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To

OUR MEN AT THE
FRONT

My Heart's Right There

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THE soldier's baby girl, in her blue print frock and white pinafore, firmly fixed into a high chair, sat up at the kitchen table, eagerly awaiting her dinner.

The high chair had seen its best days at the Rectory, where a succession of little feet had been planted upon the foot-board, adventurous bodies had been kept in place by the mahogany bar, and small, untiring fingers had screwed and unscrewed the brass knobs.

But when the final Rectory baby had been promoted to the school-room, and the pretty under-nurse had married the stalwart soldier who, having passed unscathed through the South African War

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and a long term of foreign service, had returned to her faithful, and eager for banns—the high nursery chair, into which she had so often fastened her little charges, had been presented to Polly as a keepsake.

“To remember us by!” shouted half a dozen gay young voices, as they trooped up the cottage garden path, carrying the chair between them.

“To remember us by!” they proclaimed—with the cheerful certainty of extreme youth, that all memory of them would be desirable and blessed—as they raced the chair headlong into Polly’s shining kitchen.

“To remember us by!” they explained again, as they bore it through in triumph to Polly’s little parlour, and found it a place of honour there.

They stood round, watching while Polly dusted it and rubbed it up, in the

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zealous way they all remembered, giving extra attention to well-known dents, which no amount of polishing could remove. Their faces glowed as Polly, in simple words, expressed her pleasure, declaring that to have the high chair here, almost made her feel as if she were back at the Rectory.

“Don’t you wish you was?” inquired Master Benny—the most recent occupant of the chair—his head thrown back, his masterful little chin cleft by its dimple, his eyes shining with the certainty that, of all men, he was, to Polly, most desirable.

“Nonsense!” said Miss Lilian, crushingly. “She has Jim. And you know what old Jabez said at the wedding: ‘If ever there was a love-match——’!”

“She has her kitchen,” said fat little Miss Constance, “where she can play at cooking, all day long, with those lovely pots and pans.”

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“She has a shed,” said Master Eric, “where she can chop wood all day long, if she likes.”

Little Benny had been ruminating. He lifted his eyes to Polly’s face.

“What is a love-match?” he asked. “Is it the same as a safety-match?”

Polly caught him up in her arms, and kissed his solemn little face.

“Yes, Master Benny,” she said. “That’s just exactly what it is. A love-match *is* a safety-match. It makes a woman feel safer than she ever thought to feel, in this world of ups-and-downs.”

She hid her glowing face behind his curls. In one short week, her soldier-man had taught her many wonderful things.

Miss Lilian stood on one foot and gazed at her, in dawning comprehension.

The remainder of the Rectory party became restive, and intimated a wish to explore the woodshed.

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Little Benny slipped his arms around her neck.

"Is I still your Best of Boys, my Polly?" he whispered, seductively. "Shall you always—always—love me?"

Polly hugged him. "Of course I shall, Master Benny-Boy! Of course I shall!"

Then the budding manhood in him awoke.

"Better'n Jim?" he insisted, with authority.

"Come and see the woodshed," cried Polly. "And, if we open the door *very* softly, we may see bright eyes peeping out from under the wood, and hear a scamper."

A wise woman can always distract a man's attention from an unanswered question.

Master Benny was the first to bound—on tiptoe—into the woodshed; and Jim's young wife met her soldier-man on his

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return from work, as he swung up the garden path in the sunset, with no shade upon her conscience. Master Benny was no longer Polly's "Best of Boys"; but—there was not any need to tell him so.

For a year the high chair stood in its place of honour in the parlour—a thing which had apparently outlived its usefulness; a relic of times gone by.

Then Polly placed it in a secluded corner, out of sight; yet polished it more carefully, and touched it with renewed interest and affection. And, presently, a little child came to the cottage home; and, in course of time, grew old enough to be fastened into the Rectory chair; whereupon Polly apprehended very clearly the difference between *meum* and *tuum*. Past visions of the Rectory young ladies and gentlemen faded forever from the chair

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when her own baby filled it, hammering the tray with her china mug just as Master Benny had hammered it with his silver tankard; *her* baby—who looked up at her with Jim's eyes, clear and blue, from under a tumbled mass of soft fair hair, just what her own would be, if it were not smoothed back, neatly.

The coming of the little child filled up her time, which before had been scarce full enough; for Jim had, from the first, put down his foot quite firmly on the question of any going out to work on Polly's part.

"No, my girl," he had said; "I shouldn't have married you, if I hadn't known I could keep you, without you lending a hand. Your work's in the home. Away in the Eastern desert, where the sand burns through your boots by day, and the great silver stars are so uncanny large at night and hang so low that it seems, if

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they swing any lower, they must drop out—*we* used to start singing: ‘Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home.’ And I used to say to myself: ‘There’ll be no place like home, to me, with my Polly in it.’ And no more there ain’t. But—suppose I came home from work and up the garden path, tired and glad, and found the house dark, the door locked, and the key gone. And suppose the neighbours called to me: ‘Your wife ain’t back from work, yet.’ What sort of a ‘no place like home’ would that be, d’you think? That’s the kind of thing which drives a man to turn and look for lights and welcome, where they keep open house. And if once he starts doing that, bad times begin. Now, Polly my dear,” said her soldier-man, “I’ll not deny that I *did* hear Parson mention ‘for better, for worse’; and it’s an understood thing that the Parson has it all his own way in

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church, and a man mayn't express a contrary opinion. However, a man's thoughts are his own, even in church; and when Parson mentioned 'for better, for worse,' and you said: 'I will,' so sweet in your little grey gown—says I to myself: 'Please God, it shall be all "better" and no "worse"'; and so it shall, my Polly."

During four happy years, Jim kept his word. It was all "better"—better and better, as each year went by.

Then—just before Tiny's third birthday — the senseless demoniacal ambition of one man decreed that peace and prosperity should be things of the past, in tens of thousands of happy homes.

Ambition Incarnate led the Kaiser striding to the summit of the Mount of Imagination—that "exceeding high mountain" from which can be seen "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory

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of them." The Tempter of men then whispered in the Imperial ear: "All these things will I give thee . . . if thou wilt fall down and worship me."

Unlike that Kingly One, long centuries before, Whose right was world-wide sovereignty, yet Whose answer was to choose the lowly place of obedience and of service—the Kaiser fell down and worshipped; the ministering angels of Love, Joy, and Peace, veiled their faces and fled away; the Devil entered into him, and set Europe in a blaze.

The cottage homes of England yielded their toll of men.

Jim was among the first to go.

Polly and little Tiny were left alone.

Jim's portrait—in his smartest uniform, with a row of medals on his breast and a little cane beneath his arm—was moved, in its plush frame, from the parlour table,

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and placed upon the kitchen mantelpiece where Polly and Tiny could see it, all day. A snapshot postcard, in khaki, taken just before he left for the Front, had its place upstairs, on the little table beside Polly's bed.

Jim had been gone two months, on this particular day when Tiny, in her blue print frock, sat perched upon the high chair, awaiting her dinner.

Tiny was hungry, and the stew her mother was making gave out a most promising fragrance.

Tiny beat a loud tattoo upon her plate, with the spoon and fork clasped tightly in her little hands.

Tiny's tattoo was ear-splitting in its vehemence of anticipation; but Polly never said "Hush" to a joyful noise. She had belonged to the village choir, during her time of service at the Rectory.

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... What? Oh! No reflection on the village choir. Merely, she had sung so often: "Make a joyful noise!" It inclined her to be patient with Tiny's noises, which were nearly always joyful.

Also she welcomed it on this particular day, because it covered the catching of her breath, and the short quick sobs which would not be kept back, as she stirred the stew.

Tiny sat facing the fire-place. She could see the lovely steam and watch the stirring, but she could not see the silent tears running down her mother's cheeks, nor hear the torment of suspense which broke into hard sobs.

Polly had had a letter that morning from her soldier-man, written in pencil from the trenches. It was full of "courage and gaiety," chucking jokes and stories on to paper, in order to make her laugh. Polly laughed at each one; not

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because she felt amused, but because she knew how disappointed Jim would be, if she did not laugh.

Jim's letters were remarkable for their simple vividness of description. He had always been more of a scholar than Polly. A gamekeeper's son, he had lived, in his boyhood, much in the open, among the wild things of the woods. But his mother had been a woman of superior education, possessing a little library of standard books; and she had encouraged her boy to read and to try to express his own thoughts in clear and connected language.

Thus it came to pass that Jim's letters from the Front brought the scenes of war very forcibly to the mind of the anxious loving woman, at home, who conned them over many times, her eyes sometimes wide with horror, sometimes dimmed by tears.

Surely the dignity of expression, the

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nobility of thought to be found in so many of our soldiers' letters from the Front, go to prove what unsuspected mental powers are developed by the great happenings they are called upon to face, the noble part they are so finely playing in the making, to-day, of history for all time. Yet perhaps the true secret of the hold their letters take upon our hearts is the total absence of any striving after effect; the fact that they are simple records of heroism, by men who do not know that they are heroes; who daily do fine deeds, without for a moment dreaming that their deeds are fine.

After the gay little stories, Polly reached the place where Jim mentioned, casually, that all he had had to eat that day was a raw turnip he had grubbed up in a field. His ration of bread, he had given to a starving Belgian woman and her baby girl—who cried when she saw

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the bread in his hand. He had given them the whole chunk, because the young woman reminded him of Polly, and the baby girl was wonderfully like Tiny; just her large blue eyes and fuzzy hair.

"But, bless you, don't they look wan and hungry, poor things, and dazed with sorrow. I couldn't have laid down, snug and comfy in my dig-out, if I'd 'a kept a crust of my bread back from that mother and child. She was a bit like you in the figure, my girl—not in the face; there's only one going, of that! But the kiddie was Tiny all over. Tiny—just going to cry to come to her Daddy. I couldn't let her go hungry; now, could I, my dear?"

This was where Polly's tears began to flow.

At first she hated the Belgian woman and child, for taking her Jim's rations.

Then she realised the unconscious exhibition of his tenderness toward herself

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and his own little child, shown in the story.

Then the simple unselfishness of the British soldier stirred her own generous pity for these homeless wanderers.

Ah, but the turnip—the *raw* turnip! Her tears flowed afresh as she stirred the fragrant stew she was making for herself and Tiny.

Why could she not have been there, just to—just to cook it for him? Why must her man face danger and death alone? What happened to his buttons, without her ready needle? “His buttons!” she said. “His *buttons!*” And the hard sobs broke out afresh.

Tiny paused in her tattoo. “Hurry, Mummy,” she said. “I’s hungry.”

Jim’s wife pulled herself together.

“Just ready, Baby,” she said. “Just ready.”

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She poured the stew into a dish, took some Suffolk dumplings out of the oven, brought all to the table, and helped little Tiny to gravy and vegetables. She helped herself; then stood beside the table to ask the Blessing on the food, without which no meal in this cottage home began.

But just at that moment, her anguish of anxiety seized her afresh. "What are they doing to him now—*now*, while Baby and I sit quietly at dinner? Are they killing my man? Is his strong splendid body being torn by bursting shells, or trampled in the mud by horses' pounding hoofs, or hurrying feet of men?"

She put her hand to her throat.

"Baby," she said, "you say grace, to-day. Say the grace Daddy taught you."

The soldier's baby girl laid down her spoon and fork, and gravely folded her tiny hands.

At mention of her Daddy she seemed

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to feel him laying his big hand over her little hands, and to hear him say, so that she might repeat it after him: "Please God, bless my nice dinner. Amen."

Her eyes grew solemn, with that wonderful solemnity—vibrant with the chant of Seraphim—only to be seen in the eyes of a very little child.

She turned them away from the eagerly awaited food, and, lifting them to the mantelpiece, gazed at the picture of her Daddy, standing straight and strong, with the medals on his breast.

"Say grace, Baby," urged the soldier's young wife.

And the soldier's little child shut her blue eyes, bent her curly head, and said:

"Please God—bless my dear Daddy. Amen."

So that was the baby's grace.

A sudden sense of calm came to Polly.

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She could not have put it into words, but somehow she felt that this change in Tiny's grace expressed a change which should take place in the home life, in the habits, in the ways of thought, throughout the land.

Hitherto we have been too selfish, too self-centred. It has been a question of: "What shall *we* eat? What shall *we* drink? Wherewithal shall *we* be clothed?" Our prayers and praises have largely concerned our own "nice dinners," whether spiritual, mental, or physical. There has been too much thanking the goodness and the grace which on *our* birth has smiled, without enough regard of the less good fortune, the suffering, the need, the intolerable anguish of others.

If this war has already served to turn our mind's eye away from the contemplation of our own particular stew—however

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savoury—to the great essentials of life; if it has begun to give us a wider, a more extensive, outlook, not bounded by our own particular horizon, but by our knowledge of the needs of others; if it has done this for us, in our own individual lives, which, after all, go to make up the great whole of national life—then already we see a gleam of the eternal good which is going to work out from this apparently intolerable evil.

Surely in no home, throughout Great Britain, will people find it possible to sit down to the good cheer of Christmas Day without giving thoughts of earnest sympathy to our brave men in the trenches; to the homeless heartbroken people of faithful Belgium, and of heroic France.

Yet these thoughts must not depress us. To yield to overwhelming sorrow never yet helped others to win back the crown of joy. Our earnest sympathy should

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make us bright and brave, forgetful of self; eager to help; ready to act; able to do.

The lessons of the war will be many. The effect upon the character of the people will be great and abiding. And, surely, one of the first and simplest, yet deepest, lessons is the lesson of the unconscious change in the baby's grace.

A vague comprehension of this great underlying truth came to the soldier's young wife, as she watched Tiny's dinner disappearing with astonishing rapidity, and tried to force herself to take her own.

But each time she tried to swallow she was gripped at the throat by that nightmare thought: "What are they doing to him now? What is happening in those distant trenches to the man whose flesh is as my flesh, while I sit here safe and well; helpless to help him?"

Why was it so bad to-day? She had not suffered like this before. Was it not a

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presentiment, a foreshadowing, a sombre presage of coming awful tidings?

And, even as the certainty of this dawned upon her, she heard the halting klip-klop of the old postman's ancient pony, coming along the road.

The red cart, lettered Royal Mail, drew up at her little gate.

She saw it through the window.

As a rule, she flew down the garden path to fetch her letter; for the old postman was "rheumaticky," and his descent from the cart apt to be both difficult and profane.

But to-day she seemed rooted to the ground.

Even when old Jonas rattled his gnarled knuckles indignantly upon the door, she could scarcely move across to open it.

The letter would be in a long envelope.

It would be grand and official.

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It would be from the War Office, ON HIS MAJESTY'S SERVICE, to tell her that her Jim was dead.

Quite distinctly she could see the letter through the closed door. It hardly seemed necessary to open, and take it in.

Yet she opened, and she took it in.

Her hand shook so pitifully that she dropped the letter twice before she regained her seat.

It was not from the War Office. It was neither grand nor official.

It was in Jim's handwriting, written in pencil as usual, yet without that disconcerting blankness—the no-postmark effect. The postmark was London; the date, the day before.

Polly opened it, and began to read.

At first she could not take in the full significance of the fact that the address of a large house in the west end of London headed the letter.

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"My dear Wife"—wrote Jim—

"Now don't you be startled, my girl, to find that I am on the same side of the English Channel as yourself and Tiny, and Home. It's the right side of it, I can tell you!"

"I'm in a Red Cross hospital in London. I'm wounded—but nothing to matter; so don't you worry. A German ran his bayonet into my shoulder, and a bullet found a billet in the muscle of my leg. But the steel made a good clean wound, which is healing quickly, and they moved on the bullet, before they brought me over.

"My dear, this is no end of a grand place—but the best of it is, I'm doing so well that they say I may come home to you in a few days. They want my bed for poor chaps done in worse than I am; and they asked me what sort of a wife and what sort of a home I'd got; and when I told

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them, they said I'd be as well off there as here, as soon as I can do without difficult dressings.

“Polly, my girl, as I say, this is a grand place, and I feel like the King, in fine pyjamas, full of pockets, and lots of ladies—tip-top ladies, mind you, for all they wear caps and aprons—to wait on me.

“They *do* make a lot of me and my wounds! It seems as if they can't do enough. Everything you want is there to hand, almost before you can wish for it, let alone ask. They give me smokes—of the best. They also stick a little glass tube under my tongue at intervals, which seems to interest them, though I can't say as I find it particularly repaying.

“Yes, as I say, it seems as if they can't do enough. And yet I know quite well it is not because it's *me* and *my* wounds;

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it's because I stand to them for what they feel for the whole great glorious British Army. While they're doing me, they're thinking of all the other chaps, still fighting in the trenches, or lying helpless and wounded on the battlefields. Ay, and some of them are thinking of quiet graves, left behind, lying silent and alone, where the thunder of battle has passed on; of lips under the sod, they'll never kiss again; or tumbled hair they would like just to have smoothed at the last. And all this pent-up feeling makes them very tender to me and my mates. But I don't feel a bit set up, because I know there's nothing personal in it. I just represent the entire British Army, for the time being.

“It's a proud position; indeed it is! But it gives me a lonely kind of feeling, and makes me downright hungry to get to the one woman who'll nurse me for

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myself, and want me to get well, because I'm *her* man and she can't do without me. Even if she don't wear a red cross on her chest, or give me glass tubes to suck, I want to come limping home to my own dear girl. I'm tired of calling grand ladies, 'Sister.' I want to call one simple little woman 'Wife.'

"Don't think I'm ungrateful. They're perfect Angels of kindness, and a deal *cleverer* than the angels, from all accounts. But I'm homesick already for you. When a man's down and wounded, there's just one woman he wants.

"Well, please God, it won't be many days before I walk up the little path; and we'll get best part of a month together--you, and I, and Tiny.

"Ain't I writing small and crowded? I hope you can read it, Polly. It's taken some time getting it all down. But I can't close without telling you the best

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thing of all; a sort of *crowning* thing—not that they had 'em on. Oh, no!

"Well, the very day I was brought here, the King and Queen came to see the hospital, walked through all the wards, and spoke to the men.

"I heard afterwards that as soon as they knew the visit was going to be, everybody was getting out their Ps and Qs, and brushing themselves up. But I was too dead beat by the journey, to know much about it. Oh, nothing to matter; don't you worry; just, so to say, sleepy.

"But, by and by, something sort o' made me open my eyes, and there, by my bed, stood the King and Queen, looking down at me. I knew them at once, by their pictures—as I naturally would, seeing we have them framed in the parlour. It made it seem very homelike to see them standing there; which was perhaps why, when the King asked me

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what I wanted most, I up and said to see my little village home again, and my wife, Polly—I thought you'd like to be named to the King—and my baby girl we call Tiny, though her name is Mary, after her mother. At that, the King smiled, and looked at the Queen. And I knew I hadn't been quite honest, because it *was* in Coronation Year we named her. So I up and said: 'And after the Queen, Sir, if I may make so bold as to say so.'

"I felt such a funny hot and cold feeling, and my hand shook, as it lay on the counterpane. I couldn't, for the life of me, keep it still.

"But then the sweetest kindest voice I ever heard, said: 'I am glad your little Tiny is called after me, as well as after her mother.' And I looked up; and the Queen was smiling down at me with a kind of glisten in her eyes, like very gentle tears.

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"And all of a sudden I knew that I wasn't the British Army to *Them*; I didn't stand for all sorts of other chaps who were fighting or wounded or dying or dead. It was just *me* They were sorry for—a man who was down, knocked out, lying there in horrible pain. It was *me* They wanted to help and comfort.

"My stupid old hand stopped shaking. I lay there, calm and proud; answered all questions about my wounds and how I got 'em; and about our little home. You might have thought there was nobody else in the hospital—nobody else in the whole army—wounded but me, for just those few minutes while They stood beside my bed. And the King told me to make haste and get well, because *I* was the sort of chap he wanted.

"Polly—it's one thing to read in print on a placard, YOUR KING AND COUNTRY WANT YOU; and quite another thing to

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hear it from himself, as man to man, so to speak—straight from him to you.

“ After They had gone, though I hadn’t been able before to do much more than whisper, I felt as if I must lie and shout ‘God save the King’ right through, from beginning to end. And I wanted to be up and out at the Front again, to start ‘scattering his enemies,’ right away. Then, all on a sudden, I found myself up on my elbow, laughing and cheering and singing, in a shaky kind of voice: ‘See how they run! See how they run!’

“ The Head Sister of the ward came herself and laid me down, and popped the glass thing in my mouth, which put a stopper on my singing. And she placed cool firm fingers on my wrist, and something in her touch made it easy to lie still; it was so very kind and quieting.

“ And next thing that happened was, I

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felt tears running down my cheeks. I couldn't think where they came from. Sister wiped them away with a very soft handkerchief, not making any remark.

“But I'm not one to blub. So, the moment she took the glass thing out of my mouth, I said: ‘They ain't *my* tears.’ And she laughed softly and said: ‘No, no! They're just *stray* tears. We have a lot of them going about in the wards. Now, you go to sleep, and dream of going home.’

“So to sleep I went; and I've been doing well ever since.

“Now, my girl, this is the longest letter you ever got, or I ever wrote. It has kept me happy and content writing it, a bit at a time, for hours. I didn't send you a postcard, or let anybody else send you one, because I didn't want you to know how near I was, till I was almost

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ready to come home. It won't be long after you get this, before you see me come up the path.

“‘There's no place like home,’ Polly, and ‘my heart's right there!’”

The soldier's young wife laid the precious sheets upon the table, covered them with her arms, and dropped her head upon them.

Complete silence reigned in the little kitchen.

Tiny had finished her dinner, and was methodically licking the spoon, back and front.

The old clock in the corner started ticking very loudly, with solemn insistence.

The canary, in the window, hopped up and down, up and down, in his cage—from perch to floor, and floor to perch.

Tiny, growing uneasy, fidgeted in the high chair.

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She looked at her mother's fair head—bowed, in such an abandonment of feeling, upon her outstretched arms—and perplexity dawned in her blue eyes. She dared not speak to that quiet figure.

Then she had an inspiration.

Folding her hands, but keeping her eyes half open to watch the effect, she remarked, tentatively:

“Thank God for my good dinner. Amen.”

Nothing happened.

The clock ticked louder. The canary stopped hopping up and down, and stood with his head on one side peering uncomfortably, through the bars of his cage, at Tiny.

The baby's lip quivered. If only Dicky would say “sweet”; the clock stop ticking; and Mummy sit up.

She lifted her eyes, filling with tears, to the portrait on the mantelshelf; and,

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meeting her Daddy's brave gay smile
from out the plush frame, recovered, and
smiled back.

Then she leaned forward, and gently
laid her spoon upon her mother's
head.

"Thank God for my dear Daddy," she
said.

Then Polly sprang up, flinging wide
her arms in the sunshine.

"Ah, yes!" she cried. "Yes, Tiny.
Thank God, indeed! And Daddy's
coming home. He's in a grand London
house. Fine ladies wait on him; the
King and Queen have talked to him!
Yet Daddy wants, more than anything
else, to get back to us—to you and me,
Tiny. And when he comes, I shall make a
lovely stew; no more raw turnips! And
you shall say your new grace, Baby—
your little blessing on Daddy at the
Front."

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She caught up the child and carried her to the window.

The sunbeams shone on the two fair heads.

The canary said "sweet," and began to sing.

"Look at the garden path, Tiny. Up that path your Daddy will come walking. I'm afraid he will limp at first; but we shall be proud of his limping, because it's for King and Country. He'll soon get well when *we* nurse him, Baby. I shall borrow the glass tube from the Rectory. I know all about it. We used it for measles, and chickenpox, and when Master Eric fell into the duck-pond, and got pneumonia."

She stood for a moment in the silence of a supreme thanksgiving.

Then her face grew firm and purposeful.

"I must lay in a stock of buttons," she said. "His clothes will want a lot of

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seeing to." A proud, shy light was in her eyes. "That's a thing the great ladies couldn't do for my Jim; no, nor even the Queen herself! A man turns to his own wife, when it's a matter of buttons."

* * * * *

Jim stood upon the hearth-rug in the bright little kitchen, and a look of supreme content was in his eyes, as he took in every detail which told of welcome and home.

His broad shoulders hid the portrait on the mantelshelf, wreathed in Virginian creeper and Michaelmas daisies. But what matters a photograph, when the original is before you—large as life? And what smart uniform can compare with the stained worn suit of khaki, which has come through forced marches, hard fighting, days and nights in the trenches?

Polly had had him for half an hour;

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and she was beginning to be able to look at her man, without a blinding rush of tears.

She had known his left arm would be in a sling; she had known he would limp as he came up the garden path. But she had not expected him to be so gaunt and worn; to have a look in his sunken eyes which suddenly told Polly more about what battles really mean, than anything she had read in the papers, or gathered from his letters.

A man who—calm and unafraid—has looked Death in the face, day after day, ever after looks out upon life with different eyes. The baptism of fire is a very real sacrament to the true soldier.

Even before the train, which brought her man back to her, had come to a standstill at the platform, Polly had seen in his eyes that look which told of things beyond her comprehension; the outward and

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visible sign of an inward and spiritual growth, which had made of him a different man from the gay soldier who had marched away, to the stirring strains of "Tipperary."

For one brief moment, Polly had felt herself insignificant, and the little home to which he was returning, hopelessly inadequate—notwithstanding the red leaves and purple blossoms with which she and Tiny had wreathed the pictures. A man with that look on his worn face should have been met at the station by a brass band and flying banners. Yet here was only—just a loving woman, waiting; with a baby girl, in new shoes and a clean frock, waving a penny flag.

But the next minute Jim's right arm was round them both, and the love in his eyes had taken the place of that other look.

"Are you glad to be back, Jim?" she said.

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"Glad ain't the word, Polly. Thankful's more like it."

"Tiny an' me ain't much, Jim, after the King and Queen."

Then Jim had laughed, his big hearty laugh.

"All I want," he had said. "Tiny and you are all I want. Let's get home quick."

As the little party had passed through to the Rectory carriage, Jim's hand on Polly's shoulder, the people in the train waved their handkerchiefs, and the station-master stood still and raised his hat. Jim was looking straight ahead, and did not notice. But Polly saw, and glowed with silent pride. It seemed to her that the waving banners and the brass band had been more than supplied, after all.

And now, safely at home, Jim noticed everything; the decorations; the shining pots and pans; the willow-pattern plates,

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on the dresser, which had been his grandmother's; the old clock, standing where it had always stood in the corner behind the door; the new table-cover, a present from the Rectory young ladies and gentlemen, in honour of his home-coming; the cosy red curtains, made by Polly out of a remnant given her by the draper. The only thing he did not see, standing with his back to it, was his own picture, in the central place upon the mantelshelf.

His right arm was around his wife. Little Tiny, unable to find a hand, clasped his leg, rubbing her cheek against his putties.

A light of deep content was in Jim's eyes.

Polly began asking questions, but he put them aside.

“Don’t talk of the war,” he said. “I only want to talk of you, and Tiny, and home. How’s the canary?”

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He whistled, and Dicky began to sing.

But when evening came, and Tiny was asleep in her little cot; when the red curtains were drawn, and Jim lay stretched upon the wicker couch lent from the Rectory, Polly saw in his eyes the look she had noticed as the train drew into the station—that deep brooding look, focused upon things invisible to Polly, far removed from the range of her vision and experience. It made her almost afraid of her soldier-man. And yet he was so much to her; she could not bear that any thought of his should be beyond her sharing.

She had found him lying thus, in the fading twilight, when she came back from putting Tiny to bed. She had fetched his pipe, filled it, and held a match for him. Then she had lighted the lamp,

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drawn the new curtains, and sat down to her sewing.

Jim lay, smoking contentedly. He watched Polly's flying needle; yet she knew his thoughts were far away.

Each time she lifted her head and his eyes met hers in the lamplight, he smiled; yet a dark shadow lay behind the love-light in Jim's eyes.

During half an hour the silence remained unbroken.

Then Polly folded her work, put away her needle and thimble, left the table, and came and knelt down beside the couch.

"What is it, Jim dear?" she said, gently. "Can't you tell me what's in your mind? I don't want to worry you with questions; but I think I could understand."

Jim laid down his pipe, and touched her hair with his big fingers. It had looked

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so bright and pretty, as she bent over her work in the lamplight.

“Polly,” he said, “there are things in these past weeks which a man can’t speak of to anybody at home—least of all to the woman he loves best. He could only speak of them to the chaps who’ve been with him in the trenches, who’ve marched through the ruined villages, who’ve seen—God help them!—what he has seen; who know, what he knows. You would have cause never to forgive me—I should never forgive myself—if, to ease my own mind by sharing them, I passed on to you the ghastly things I’ve been forced to know and to see, away where the Devil has been let loose to work his will on defenceless women, and on little children.

“But there are some things I *can* tell you, Polly; and I’ve been lying here, trying to think how to begin! Before

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we go to sleep this night, my girl, I want to tell you the prayer I prayed every day in the trenches; and I want to tell you why I prayed it, and where I found it."

From the breast-pocket of his tunic, Jim produced a small book, bound in khaki, stamped on the cover, in red lettering:

"ACTIVE SERVICE" TESTAMENT.

"This was given me, Polly, just as we were starting for the Front. I don't know that I should have set such great store by it—though it was given me with a kind word, and was a handy size to carry in my pocket—but when I opened it, there, just inside the cover was a written message from the man whose word meant more to me than the word of any man on earth. Now, you take it to the light, my girl, and read it out. I've read it to myself, many a time;

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but I'd like to hear it read out loud, here in my little home, by you."

Polly took the book from Jim's hand, carried it to the table, held it close to the lamp, and bent over the open page.

There was silence in the cottage room.

The strong, eager face of the soldier was in shadow, but the light shone upon his bandages, and upon the big limbs stretched on the couch. His eyes were fixed, expectant, on his wife's gentle face.

Polly was all of a flutter, at being suddenly called upon to read aloud to Jim; but she would not fail him, in this his first request. She carefully mastered the meaning of the short sentences; and they were so grandly simple that this was easy. Then, steadying her voice with an effort, she began to read, slowly and clearly.

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LORD ROBERTS'S MESSAGE

AUGUST 25, 1914

I ASK YOU TO PUT YOUR TRUST IN GOD. HE WILL WATCH OVER YOU AND STRENGTHEN YOU. YOU WILL FIND IN THIS LITTLE BOOK GUIDANCE WHEN YOU ARE IN HEALTH, COMFORT WHEN YOU ARE IN SICKNESS, AND STRENGTH WHEN YOU ARE IN ADVERSITY.

ROBERTS

F. M.

Polly lifted her eyes from the page, and looked at Jim.

His face glowed.

"That's it, my girl," he said. "'Roberts, F. M.' Do you know what 'F. M.' stands for? Why Field Marshal, of course. But to me, and many other chaps, it stands for more than that. It stands for First of Men!"

"I was only a youngster at the time

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of the Boer War; but I marched under him to relieve Kimberley, and then on to Pretoria. There's nobody like him! The greatest soldier ever was. Yet he'd get off his horse to give a drink of water out of his own bottle to a man who'd fallen out on the march and was lying dead-beat by the roadside. A chum of mine went lame on a march. Bobs, riding by, noticed it. He dismounted, put my chum on his own horse, and himself marched the rest of the way. I saw that with my own eyes. Do you wonder we loved him? Always a cheery word for everybody; always careful thought for all; and to march with him meant to march to victory.

“Well, you can see what it was to me, to find this message straight from him, in my Testament. ‘If Bobs says it, it’s true!’ says I. And I made up my mind, I’d look in it each day for ‘guidance,’

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'comfort' and 'strength'; and, the Lord knows, it wasn't long before we needed all three.

"Well, I started to read *James*; because being m' own name, it seemed more particularly meant for me. And there, in the very first chapter, I found these words: 'That ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.' 'That's the prayer for me,' says I. So every day I used to pray: 'O God, if I'm called upon to die, let it be a bullet through my heart, swift and clean. But, if I'm to live and go back to Polly, let me get home perfect and entire, wanting nothing.'"

Jim swung himself off the couch, and stood, tall and straight, upon the hearth-rug.

"And here I am, my girl, a *whole* man—wounded, I grant you—but perfect and entire, arms and legs, all here; nothing missing!"

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Polly surveyed him with tender pride and thankfulness; but grave doubt was in her mind.

"Jim dear," she said, "I don't think the text means that; really, I don't. The Rector preached on it, two Sundays ago; and he said nothing at all about *bodies*. He applied it all to *souls*."

Jim's hearty laugh sounded no whit abashed.

"I'll tell you what it is, my girl," he said. "Texts are wonderful things. They have a way of holding all sorts of meanings—just according to a man's needs. I can well believe that the Rector, safely boxed up in his pulpit, a-looking down on his peaceful congregation, in the quiet of an English Sabbath Day, had no thought of anything but *souls* when he preached on that text. But if he'd ha' been in the trenches, with lyddite shells droppin' and burstin'

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all around; with arms and legs, and worse, being torn off on all sides—well, the Rector would have had his mind turned on to *bodies*; and he'd ha' known the comfort a promise like that can bring to a man under fire, when he applies it to his own need, and makes it into a prayer.

“Lor’,” cried Jim, slapping his thigh with his right hand, “wouldn’t it wake up the congregations in some o’ these village churches, if a shell arrived amongst ‘em—slap bang, in the middle of the sermon! Shall I tell you what it’s like, Polly, when you lie waiting for them, in the trenches, and they come?

“Well, you can’t hear the big guns go off; they’re too far away; but you hear the shells coming, for about ten seconds before they burst. It first sounds like wind in the trees. Then it gets louder and louder, gradually going up the scale, till at last it sounds like an express train

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rushing through a station. Then a hellish roar, and the whole ground shakes; then a lot of falling earth comes down; and then, last of all, come what we call 'the bees'—pieces of shell that are blown straight up in the air. We call them the bees, because they make a noise like a bee as they come down. That's a lyddite shell; and it's no manner of use being in a funk-hole for them; because they dig holes, ten feet broad and six feet deep, on a hard road. The nerve-breaking work is just sitting, waiting for the next shell to come. It's not that one's a bit afraid to die; it's the uncertainty as to whether the *next* shell is going to kill you, or the one after that. A shrapnel shell bursts in the air, and blows out about two hundred lead bullets, just like marbles; and so long as you're in your funk-hole for those, it's all right."

Jim paused. He had been speaking

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with eager interest, not noticing Polly's whitening face. She tried to hide from him the terror at her heart. She wanted to hear all he could tell; she wanted to know. She forced her voice into a semblance of cheerful unconcern.

“Will it soon be over, Jim?”

“Over?” said Jim. “Not yet awhile. Polly, this is an *awful* war. In the whole history of the world, there's never been a war like it; and I'll tell you why.

“We ain't only fighting against *men*, out there. We're fighting the Devil. . . . No, my girl, I'm not speaking lightly, nor taking anybody's name in vain. I'm telling you a solemn, awful truth. Wiser an' better men than me, think the same thing. You ask the Archbishop of Canterbury!

“The Boer War was a different thing altogether. I was quite a youngster then, and didn't know much about the rights of it; but we all knew we were fighting

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men—honest men, most of 'em; brave men, all of 'em; good old farmers who were fighting, as they thought, for their own homesteads—not wrecking and burning the homes of other people. You see they'd been led into it by one gamey old chap, who thought he could put his big foot down on the British flag, and stand on it. We had to make him step off; we had to hoist the flag, and keep it flying; we had to prove that the Queen was on the throne, and that England knew how to look after her Colonists. But, when it was all over, we could shake hands and be friends. There was respect for each other, and good faith on both sides; and 'let's bear no malice.'

"But this war, Polly, is more than a fight for earthly crowns and kingdoms; ay, more even than a struggle to keep our homes safe, and our wives and little children free from perils worse than shot

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and shell. We're fighting for right and justice, against treachery and wrong.

“It's a righteous war, my girl; and every man who fears God and honours the King should be up, and out, and ready to do his share; and every woman who loves her home must be willing bravely to do her part, by letting her man go. And if she has to hear that he has given his life, she must stand up, brave and true—as a soldier's wife or a soldier's mother—and say: ‘God save the King!’”

Jim paused. Polly knew something more was coming. She laid down the khaki Testament, folded her hands and looked up at her husband with lips which trembled, but with a light of earnest resolve in her eyes.

“Polly, my dear girl,” said Jim, slowly; “when I prayed that, even if I were wounded, I might come home ‘perfect and entire, wanting nothing,’ it wasn't to

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stay at home. It was so that I might be fit and able as soon as could be, to go out again. If I had lost an arm or a leg, I should have been done for, where fighting is concerned; but, thank God, I haven't. These wounds will soon heal; you must get me fit as quick as may be; and then I'm off to the Front again; and you must be glad to let me go."

Polly stood up and faced her big soldier, bravely. Her face was very white and her lips trembled. But the high courage in her eyes matched his.

"God save the King!" said Polly, simply.

Upstairs, they stood together beside Tiny's cot, and watched her rosy sleep. Then Polly told Jim the little story of the change in Tiny's grace.

"Ain't she precious, Jim?" said Polly.
"See her pretty curls upon the pillow."

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And suddenly Jim remembered a baby girl just Tiny's age, that he had seen lying dead in the street of a Belgian village, her little head dashed upon the cobbles; her fair curls matted with blood; the small, dead hands still clasping a battered doll.

Tears were in the big soldier's eyes. They were not stray tears this time; they were the brave tears of a man who was facing the fact that he must fight for the safety of his little sleeping child, and for the honour of his fair young wife.

He put his right arm around her, and caught her to his breast.

“Oh, Polly,” he said; “it’s for King and Country, and Home!”

Polly held him close. She knew she must let him go again; she meant to be brave about letting him go. But, anyway she had him now.

Then she remembered the first part of

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his prayer: "If I'm called upon to die, let it be a bullet through my heart, swift and clean." Ah, thank God, it had not been that! She slipped her hand under the sling, and laid it on his breast. She could feel the steady beat, beneath her palm.

Laughing, Jim lifted her face to his, and looked into her eyes.

"Yes, Polly," he said; "there's no doubt at all about it. 'My heart's right there!'"

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